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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The growth of the global older population, citizens who are living longer productive lives, is considered one of the most challenging demographic trends of the twenty-first century. A steady stream of 1 million persons a month now crosses the threshold of age 60; and 80 per cent of them are in developing countries. The total number of those aged 60 and above is projected to reach 600 million by the year 2001 and go on to reach 1.2 billion by the year 2025, when over 70 per cent of them will be living in what are today's developing countries. These numbers illustrate a far-reaching, if quiet, demographic revolution now affecting the social and economic structures of societies.

For all countries, the foremost challenge lies in identifying and supporting the new opportunities for older persons and the benefits for society that arise from viewing older persons as a resource rather than a burden. Older persons have self-reliance and the potential for making contributions to their families and communities and, by means of these contributions, for improving the quality of life *for all* in a sustainable manner. To fulfil this potential, older persons must have access to adequate resources to meet basic needs and must be incorporated into decision-making processes.

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Commitment 4 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development specifically refers to the promotion of social integration by fostering those activities that ensure the full participation of all generations in society. The International Federation on Ageing, on behalf of the NGO Committee on Ageing, proposes the following actions to enable older persons to have full partnership in their communities and in society:

(a) Governments and civil society should invest in their elderly, who are a valuable and productive resource in all societies with a wealth of knowledge, skills, diverse cultural heritages and lifelong experiences, which must be utilized to enable societies to accommodate themselves to the unprecedented population shift referred to above. Social development will benefit from the substantive contributions of older persons taking responsibilities in their communities and in society;

(b) Older persons need adequate resources to meet basic needs — namely, accessible health and social services, shelter, adequate income and employment opportunities, including retraining, second careers, and recognition of the value of unpaid as well as paid work, and full participation in society, including decision-making processes;

(c) Respect for every person's dignity and human rights must be upheld to the very end of the life cycle. Media and educational efforts must be directed towards countering negative attitudes and myths regarding ageing, which still persist globally.

We look to the Commission for Social Development to promote social integration, which by its very nature implies the full participation and partnership of all generations in a "society for all ages". This theme for 1999, the International Year of Older Persons, provides an opportunity for Governments and civil society to measure progress in moving towards the objectives we have stated above.